

Education Governance Responses
Hyde Park Meeting (4/3/07) – Lamoille Union High School

48 Attendees (facilitated by Jill Remick)

Question #1: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the present education governance system in your community?:

Advantages

Local control

We do a lot of work w/K-12 focus now & across S.U.

Community knows all people on board

Feels like all board members have our interests at heart (community & student interests)

Each community “owns” their school & supports it.

Easier to make a local decision – know what community wants

Parents comfortable approaching local/known board members

LSSU has two K-12 systems each w/ board and Elmore – our supt. serves fewer boards
(compared to some)

Our supt. knows teachers, students, programs

Reflects our close-knit communities and is not an “institutional” system

5 people are more representative of a community (compared to 1)

Contract negotiations are straightforward and collaborative

More involvement closer to community

Communities able to structure for own needs

Superintendent less authority

Close community involvement with elementary school & high school

Local budget control

Greater knowledge of school operations, personnel matters, & student issues

More elected officials means more democratic involvement

More open society

Different philosophies is a plus

Voice – know your neighbor

If consistent leadership, vision/goals equals positive impact on student learning

Creativity within schools when times are tough

Committed leaders choose to stay = local satisfaction

Multiple school board members in single town gives much more social representation

Full access to supt. for the communities

Last bit of true local control

Super has first-hand knowledge of communities’ demographics

It’s a well known entity – why change?

“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

More people involved in schools

More individualized approach for each school

Allows broader range of ideas & individual school philosophies

Pooled resources for efficiency in S.U. office

As a parent I can go to school board in my town & often times my questions are answered

Balanced perspective

Sense of Community

Historic precedence

Avoids needless centralization
Decisions closest to students
Reflects local culture
Well-liked, people feel attached
Job security – hard to upset all the boards
Synergy between schools
School boards & principals can work closely together
Principals have a greater ability to make meaningful, lasting change, and to maintain a close relationship with the town.
Greater community identity that mirrors the town government structure, i.e., county government doesn't really exist in Vermont

Disadvantages

Size limits options – courses, etc.
May be less efficient in terms of managing changes in class size
Three to four boards for supt. to work with
Odds of “board members clique” vs stick together – even
Superintendents’ office/staff time
No common contracts/policies
Managing a variety of contracts/policies
Miscommunication
Limited superintendent contact
Sharing of administrators
Superintendent less authority
Uniformity & outcomes differ
None
Not treated as K-12 system in LNSU
At high school level – no local cooperation in LNSU
Burn-out rate of administrators
If not consistent leadership can have negative impact on student learning
Present system calls for more of a “crisis” management style
Super spends all time at meetings and traveling.
Too many boards to deal with adequately
Present system promotes “micro-management” of situations
A lot of time wasted in traveling and not enough time in solving problems
Lack of professional staff time
Requires more meeting time
Many communities have trouble finding board members
Redundancy of paper work – policy manuals, etc.
Doesn't foster global thinking
Not an efficient communication stream
Easy to avoid accountability by superintendent
Lack of uniformity of standards
Difficult finding interested qualified people to run for school board
End up getting people who have their own agendas & do not represent the local taxpayers
People running for school board often unknown to the people
Each town has to negotiate its own teachers' contracts – takes a lot of boards' time
Current S.U. board too big (too many people)
Smaller schools don't have same advantages for curriculum as larger schools

Difficult to hire part-time
People feel attached – blind loyalty
Error rate is higher due to variables – rework expensive
Cost of duplication of positions
Students lack flexibility – school choice
Lack of talent at local school
Local boards less likely to maintain appropriate roles – tendency to micro-manage
Limited pool of superintendents

Question #2: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the school district model suggested by Commissioner Cate in his White Paper?

Advantages

Neater flow charts
Superintendent reports to one board rather than 3, 5, 7, etc.
Cost savings? We don't know
Less pressure on administrators
Common professional development
Principals/Superintendents “free up” on time
Streamlined
Common curriculum
Improve student services – needs – shared
Economy of personnel/contracts
Consistency in risk management
Breaks down existing division between towns
Central office operations more efficient
Smaller S.U. board, more qualified board members – people who want position as opposed to bodies to fill position.
Fewer meetings for board members
More uniform salary for teachers/staff – one contract/district
More uniform benefits for teachers/staff – better staff retention
Cost advantage – fewer superintendents & attending one meeting as opposed to 6-7
Sharing teacher resources - especially for “specials”
More efficient
Better coordination, K-12
Higher level of oversight
Bring board up to more of a policy governance level
Possible more “choice schools”
Reduces number of districts
Less board meetings to attend
More quality applicants for superintendent
Save travel time and sanity
Superintendent has a more focused job

Disadvantages

Loss of local control
If savings w/this model, is it worth it?
Worry about closing small schools – serious concern
Weighted votes?

Further disengage the public – Apathy. i.e., large SU meeting/budgets now have low attendance & participation
Lack of flexibility in schools – more rigidity w/regards to curriculum, timeframes
Loss of community centers – their schools
Loss of connectivity for kids, especially in the socio-economic realm
Is it an erosion of democracy?
Less scrutiny
Less responsiveness to community
To make significant cost savings, need to consolidate schools
Boundaries are arbitrary – hard to mesh with town meeting model
Lack of clarity
Reduces number of community members involved in school management
Perception of unbalanced representation
National Uniformity Model
Union board would have to deal with all issues from all schools – take more time.
Changes to programs (Mathland) will have large start-up costs (materials & training)
Only one high school rep on board
How will taxation work?
Wouldn't allow for individual issues that may come up
No consensus among different towns
Diminished community involvement
Unbalanced perspective for each community when limited to one member on board
Loss of all the positives in LSSU's current system
Plan lacks detail, re: impact on tax structure & cost
Will take more time/work for Supt. to "meld" the needs/cultures of 3 unique communities – longer meetings
We already work w/K-12 focus and S.U. wide – nothing to be gained
Use of supervisory union boundaries is better than arbitrary/other boundaries
What would happen to negotiated agreements? It would be a cost driver – not an efficiency
More cumbersome & contentious negotiations
May require a lot more committees and committee work, which also takes Supt. time
It's a shell game
Proposal could be helpful/a good fit in other communities (just not a good fit for us in LSSU)
It is difficult to anticipate unintended consequences without more details
Tendency to create "robots"
There is no place for suggestions in the White Paper
School Choice could present problems
We need a suggestion category
Same number of students to administer
It doesn't save money - people complain about cost not governance
It is easier to "hide the dirty laundry" – fewer relationships, larger bureaucracy
Huge issues in equalizing capital assets and restructuring tax rates
Benefits are largely unknown & consequences (unintended) are unknown
Big risk – medical model? Cancer treatment for all?

Debrief Comments:

Re: Economies of Scale – State takeover health care insurance costs of all school personnel – 100% backed out of local budget with goal of 25% employee cost share of premium in future. similar to teacher retirement fund.

Special ed costs – 100% funded by state/federal – backed out of local budget

We should be looking to the future when we examine governance, not the present. That is a reactionary mode, not proactive

More involvement is always better than less – democracy thrives in a more pluralistic society

Re-examine the state standards for education to see what this would impact.

Schools by discipline

School Choice

One common budget for all 6 boards

Regional academies in core discipline areas

Advantages are common contracts – savings on negotiations

A system where parent, student, & teacher feel comfortable expressing their voice

Improve policy – work to connect better to vision

Improve public awareness & knowledge to connect better to vision

Big, continued concerns w/where and how money comes from, especially with federal laws which are not fully funded

Baby steps – more study – learn from those who have done this and found success or not

School choice needs to be defined – how, cost

Explain Superintendent's appointment of principal in detail

Class size – will it be maintained as in White Paper?

Job description for Superintendent

How will this effect dealing with the teachers union: ie. class size

How about standardized tests?

Multiple representatives rather than one rep w/weighted vote

Investigate areas of consolidation – contracts

Centralize some specialists in areas such as: maintenance, technology, H.R., SLP's, Nurses

Even if current model doesn't change, the process needs to be made more efficient. Process takes time.

Quantify cost & benefit of this approach

Compare with other known models

How will schools be funded?

Is there a possibility for school choice/transportation?

Would Magnet schools be possible?

How is the weighted vote determined – is it by voters/students – other?

Are we talking about one budget?

As in 1870, we should enable but not mandate these changes – offer incentives and decrease barriers to encourage people to consider these kinds of change locally.

Use classroom teachers for Teacher Student Ratio

Observation reinforced on decisions already being made

Is this process about governance or how to fix schools

Suggestion: add assessment data to bulleted handouts

Suggestion: Include voting population on handouts